

QUESTION 112

The Cause of Grace

Next we have to consider the causes of grace. On this topic there are five questions: (1) Is God alone an efficient cause of grace? (2) Is any disposition toward grace required on the part of the one who receives the grace, through an act of free choice? (3) Can this sort of disposition be a necessity for grace? (4) Is grace equal in everyone? (5) Can someone know that he has grace?

Article 1

Is God alone a cause of grace?

It seems not to be the case that God alone is a cause of grace:

Objection 1: John 1:17 says, “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” But in the name ‘Jesus Christ’ one understands not just the divine nature that assumes, but also the created nature that is assumed. Therefore, some creature is able to be a cause of grace.

Objection 2: The difference posited between the sacraments of the New Law and the sacraments of the Old Law is that the sacraments of the New Law are a cause of the grace which the sacraments of the Old Law merely signified. But the sacraments of the New Law are certain visible elements. Therefore, it is not the case that God alone is a cause of grace.

Objection 3: According to Dionysius in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, the angels cleanse, illuminate, and perfect both lower angels and men. But a rational creature is cleansed and illuminated and perfected through grace. Therefore, it is not the case that God alone is a cause of grace.

But contrary to this: Psalm 83:12 says, “The Lord will give grace and glory.”

I respond: No entity is able to act beyond its species, since it must always be the case that a cause is more powerful (*potior*) than its effect. But the gift of grace exceeds every power of created nature, since it is nothing other than a certain participation in God’s nature, which exceeds every other nature. And so it is impossible for any creature to be a cause of grace. For it is as necessary that God alone should deify (*deificet*), by communicating a share of the divine nature through a certain participation in His likeness, as that it is impossible that anything other than fire alone should produce fire.

Reply to objection 1: As Damascene puts it in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, Christ’s human nature (*humanitas Christi*) is “like an instrument (*organum*)” of His divinity. But an instrument effects the principal agent’s action not by its own power but by the power of the principal agent. And so Christ’s human nature is a cause of grace not by its own power, but by the power of the adjoined divine nature (*sed virtute divinitatis adiunctae*), by virtue of which the actions of Christ’s human nature are salvific (*ex qua actiones humanitatis Christi sunt salutes*).

Reply to objection 2: Just as, in the very person of Christ, the human nature is a cause of our salvation through grace, with the divine power acting as the principal cause, so, too, in the sacraments of the New Law, which flow from Christ (*quae derivantur a Christo*), grace is caused instrumentally, as it were, through the sacraments themselves, whereas it is caused principally by the power of the Holy Spirit operating in the sacraments—this according to John 3:5 (“Unless a man be born again from water and Holy Spirit, etc.”).

Reply to objection 3: An angel cleanses, illuminates, and perfects an angel or a man by means of some sort of instruction, and not by justifying him through grace (*per modum instructionis cuiusdam, non autem iustificando per gratiam*). Hence, in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 7, Dionysius says that this sort of cleansing, illuminating, and perfecting is “nothing other than the reception of divine knowledge.”

Article 2

Is any preparation or disposition for grace required on the part of a man?

It seems that no preparation or disposition for grace is required on the part of a man:

Objection 1: In Romans 4:4 the Apostle says, “To someone who works, the reward is imputed as a debt and not according to grace.” But a man’s preparation through free choice occurs only through some work (*non nisi per aliquam operationem*). Therefore, the character of grace would be destroyed.

Objection 2: Someone who persists in his sin is not preparing himself to have grace. But grace has been given to some who were persisting in their sin, as is clear in the case of Paul, who, as Acts 9:1 reports, received grace even while he was “breathing threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.” Therefore, no preparation for grace is required on the part of a man.

Objection 3: An agent with infinite power does not require a disposition on the part of the matter, since he does not even require matter itself; this is clear in the case of the act of creating, since this act is compared with the giving of grace, which is itself called “a new creature” in Galatians 6:15. But as has been explained (a. 1), only God, who has infinite power, is a cause of grace. Therefore, no preparation is required on the part of a man for receiving grace.

But contrary to this: Amos 4:12 says, “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel,” and 1 Kings 7:3 says, “Prepare your hearts for the Lord”.

I respond: As has been explained above (q. 109, aa. 2 and 3 and 6 and 9, and q. 110, a. 2, and q. 111, a. 2), ‘grace’ is said in two ways: (a) sometimes for God’s habitual gift itself and (b) sometimes for God’s assistance in moving the soul toward the good.

Thus, on the first way of taking ‘grace’, some preparation for grace is needed for grace, since no form can exist except in disposed matter.

However, if we are speaking of ‘grace’ insofar as it signifies God’s assistance in moving the soul toward the good, then no preparation is required on the part of a man in the sense of something that precedes God’s assistance. To the contrary, any preparation that can exist in a man is itself from God’s assistance in moving the soul toward the good. Accordingly, the good movement of free choice by which someone is prepared to receive the gift of grace is itself an act of free choice as moved by God, and it is in this respect that a man is said to prepare himself—this according to Proverbs 16:1 (“It is the part of man to prepare his mind”). This movement is from God as a principal cause (*principaliter a Deo*) moving the faculty of free choice and, accordingly, a man’s will is said to be prepared by God and a man’s steps to be directed by the Lord (Psalm 36:23).

Reply to objection 1: A man’s act of preparing (*preparatio*) to have grace is something simultaneous with the very infusion of the grace. And such an operation is, to be sure, meritorious; however, it merits not *grace*, which is already had, but instead *glory*, which is not yet had.

Now there is another, imperfect act of preparing for grace that sometimes precedes the gift of sanctifying grace and yet is still from God as a mover. However, as long as the man has not yet been justified through grace, this sort of act is not sufficient for merit. For as will be explained below (q. 114, a. 2), there can be no merit except on the basis of grace.

Reply to objection 2: Since a man cannot prepare himself for grace unless God comes in first and moves him toward the good (*nisi Deo eum praeveniente et movente ad bonum*), it does not matter whether someone comes to complete preparation quickly or little by little. For Ecclesiasticus 11:23 says, “It is easy in God’s eyes to make a poor man rich all of a sudden.”

Now it sometimes happens that God moves a man toward some good, but not toward a perfect good; and this sort of preparation precedes grace. However, He sometimes moves a man toward the good completely and instantaneously (*statim perfecte*), and the man receives grace suddenly—this according to John 6:45 (“Everyone who has heard from the Father and has learned comes to me”). And this is the way

it happened with Paul, since while he was still persisting in his sin, his heart was moved suddenly and perfectly by God to listen and to learn and to come. And in this way he received grace all of a sudden.

Reply to objection 3: An agent with infinite power does not need matter or the disposition of matter in the way that they are presupposed by the action of some other cause. However, it must still be the case that, in keeping with the constitution of the thing to be caused, the agent causes within that thing itself its matter and the appropriate disposition for its form. Likewise, in order for God to infuse grace into a soul, there is no preparation required that He does not bring about Himself.

Article 3

Must grace necessarily be given to someone who prepares himself for grace or who does what is within his power?

It seems that grace must necessarily be given to someone who prepares himself for grace or who does what is within his power (*ex necessitate detur gratia se praeeparanti ad gratiam, vel facienti quod in se est*):

Objection 1: A Gloss on Romans 5:1 (“Having been justified by faith, let us have peace”) says, “God accepts the one who flees to Him; otherwise, there would be iniquity in Him.” But it is impossible for there to be iniquity in God. Therefore, it is impossible for God not to accept someone who flees to Him. Therefore, he must necessarily receive grace.

Objection 2: In *De Casu Diaboli* Anselm says, “The reason why God did not give the devil grace is that he willed not to accept it; nor was he prepared for it.” But when the cause is removed, the effect is necessarily removed. Therefore, if someone wills to accept grace, then it must necessarily be given to him.

Objection 3: As is clear from Dionysius in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, the good is communicative of itself. But the good of grace is better than the good of nature. Therefore, since a natural form must necessarily come to a disposed matter, it seems that, *a fortiori*, grace must necessarily be given to someone who prepares himself for grace.

But contrary to this: A man is related to God as clay to a potter—this according to Jeremiah 18:6 (“As clay is in the hand of a potter, so you are in my hand”). But no matter how the clay is prepared, it does not necessarily receive a form from the potter. Therefore, no matter how a man prepares himself, he does not receive grace from God necessarily.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 2), a man’s act of preparing for grace comes *from God* as a mover and *from free choice* as what is moved. Therefore, there are two possible ways to consider the act of preparing:

(a) First, insofar as it comes from free choice. In this regard, the act has no necessity of attaining grace, since the gift of grace exceeds all the preparation that belongs to human power.

(b) Second, the act can be considered insofar as it is from God as a mover. And in this case it does have a necessity with respect to that toward which it is ordered by God—not a necessity of coercion, but a necessity of infallibility (*non quidem coactionis sed infallibilitatis*), since God’s intention cannot fail. This accords with what Augustine says in *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*: “Whoever is liberated through God’s gifts is liberated with absolute certitude.” Hence, if it is God’s intention as mover that a man whose heart He is moving should receive grace, then the man infallibly receives it—this according to John 6:45 (“Everyone that has heard from the Father and has learned comes to me”).

Reply to objection 1: The Gloss in question is talking about someone who flees to God through a meritorious act of free choice as already informed by grace, where it would be contrary to the justice that God Himself has established if the man were not to receive grace.

Alternatively, if the Gloss is referring to a movement of free choice before grace, then it is speaking in such a way that the man's very fleeing to God comes through God's motion, which cannot fall short of what is just.

Reply to objection 2: The first cause of a lack of grace comes from us, whereas the first cause of the reception of grace comes from God—this according to Hosea 13:9 (“The perdition, O Israel, is yours; your help is only from me”).

Reply to objection 3: Even among natural things, the disposition of the matter necessarily follows upon the form only through the power of the agent that causes the disposition.

Article 4

Is grace greater in one man than in another?

It seems that grace is not greater in one man than in another:

Objection 1: As has been explained (q. 110, a. 4), grace is caused in us by God's love. But Wisdom 6:8 says, “He has made the little and the great, and He cares equally for all.” Therefore, everyone receives grace equally from Him.

Objection 2: What is said in the superlative does not admit of more and less (*ea quae in summo dicuntur non recipiunt magis et minus*). But ‘grace’ is said in the superlative, since grace joins one to the ultimate end. Therefore, it does not admit of more and less. Therefore, it is not greater in one man than in another.

Objection 3: In the sense explained above (q. 110, a. 1), grace is the life of the soul. But ‘to live’ does not admit of more and less. Therefore, neither does ‘grace’.

But contrary to this: Ephesians 4:7 says, “To each of us grace is given according to the measure of Christ's giving.” But what is given in a measured way is not given equally to all. Therefore, it is not the case that all have equal grace.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 52, aa. 1 and 2, and q. 66, aa. 1 and 2), there are two possible ways to measure the greatness of a habit: (a) the one based on the habit's *end* or *object*, in accord with which one virtue is more noble than another to the extent that it is ordered toward a greater good; and (b) the other based on the *subject*, which participates to a greater or lesser degree in the inhering habit.

Therefore, in accord with the first measure of greatness, sanctifying grace cannot be greater or lesser, since by its nature grace joins a man to the highest good, viz., God.

However, on the part of the subject grace can admit of more and less, viz., insofar as one individual is illuminated more perfectly by grace than another is. One reason for this difference stems from someone's preparing himself for grace; for one who prepares himself to a greater degree for grace receives a fuller grace.

Still, this cannot be the primary reason for the difference in question, since the preparation for grace belongs to a man only insofar as his free choice is prepared by God. Hence, the primary cause of the difference has to be taken from God Himself, who dispenses the gifts of His grace in different ways, in order that the beauty and perfection of the Church might emerge from different grades, just as He has instituted diverse grades of entities in order that the universe might be perfect. Hence, in Ephesians 4, after having said, “To every one of us is given grace according to the measure of Christ's giving” (4:7), the Apostle, having enumerated the different graces, adds, “... for the perfecting of the saints in building up the body of Christ” (4:12).

Reply to objection 1: There are two possible ways to think of God's care:

The first is with respect to *God's act itself*, which is simple and uniform, and in this sense His care

is related equally to everyone, since He dispenses greater and lesser things by a single and simple act.

But one can think of another sense on the part of the things in creatures that come from God's care. And in this sense one finds inequality, viz., insofar as by His care God provides greater gifts for some and lesser gifts for others.

Reply to objection 2: This argument goes through for the first sense of the greatness of grace. For grace cannot be greater in the sense of being ordered to a greater good; rather, it can be greater because it orders one to a greater or lesser degree toward participating in the same good to a greater or lesser degree. For as far as the subject's participation is concerned, there can be differences of intensity or remission, both in the grace itself and in final glory.

Reply to objection 3: Natural life has to do with a man's substance, and this is the reason why it does not admit of more and less. By contrast, a man participates in the life of grace as an accident (*accidentaliter*), and so the man can have it to a greater or lesser degree.

Article 5

Can a man know that he has grace?

It seems that a man can know that he has grace:

Objection 1: Grace is in the soul through the soul's essence. But as is clear from Augustine in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 12, the soul's most certain cognition is of those things that are in the soul through the soul's essence. Therefore, grace can be known with the highest certitude by someone who has grace.

Objection 2: Just as knowledge is God's gift, so too is grace. But one who receives knowledge from God knows that he has knowledge—this according to Wisdom 7:17 (“The Lord has given me true knowledge of the things that are”). Therefore, by parity of reasoning, one who receives graces from God knows that he has grace.

Objection 3: Light is more knowable than darkness, since according to the Apostle in Ephesians 5:13, “All that is made manifest is light.” But sin, which is spiritual darkness, can be known with certitude by one who has sin. So, all the more, can grace be known, since it is spiritual light.

Objection 4: In 1 Corinthians 2:12 the Apostle says, “Now we have received not the Spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is of God, that we may know the things that are given to us by God.” But grace is God's principal gift. Therefore, a man who receives grace through the Holy Spirit knows through that same Spirit that grace has been given to him.

Objection 5: In Genesis 22:12 it is said to Abraham in the person of God, “Now I know that you fear God,” i.e., “I have made you know.” Now this is said here because of his chaste fear, which does not exist without grace. Therefore, a man is able to know that he has grace.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiastes 9:1, “No man knows whether he is worthy of hatred or worthy of love.” But sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*) is what makes a man worthy of God's love. Therefore, no one can know whether he has sanctifying grace.

I respond: There are three ways in which something can be known (*potest cognosci*):

In one way, *through revelation*. And someone can know in this way that he has grace. For God sometimes reveals this to certain individuals by a special privilege, in order that the joy of security might begin in them in this life, so that they might more confidently and courageously carry out magnificent deeds and sustain the evils of the present life—just as it was said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

In a second way, *a man knows something on his own and with certitude (per seipsum et hoc certitudinaliter)*. And in this sense no one can know that he has grace. For certitude cannot be had with

respect to anything unless that matter can be judged by its proper principle, since it is in this way that certitude is had with respect to conclusions that are demonstrated through universal indemonstrable principles. But no one can know that he has knowledge of any given conclusion, if he does not know the relevant principle. But the principle of grace, as well as its object, is God Himself, who because of His excellence is not known to us—this according to Job 36:26 (“Behold, God is great, exceeding our knowledge”). And so the presence or absence of grace in us cannot be known with certitude in this way—this according to Job 9:11 (“If He comes to me, I will not see Him; if He departs, I will not perceive it”). And so a man cannot discern with certitude whether or not he himself has grace—this according to 1 Corinthians 4:3-4 (“But neither do I judge my own self ... Rather, the one who judges me is the Lord”).

In a third way, something is known *conjecturally through signs*. And someone can know in this way that he has grace, viz., insofar as (a) he perceives himself to take delight in God and to contemn worldly things, and insofar as (b) the man is not conscious of any mortal sin in himself. It is in this way that one can understand what is said in Apocalypse 2:17 (“To him who overcomes I will give the hidden manna ... which no man knows except the one who receives it”—since he who receives it knows it through his experience of sweetness, which he who does not receive it does not experience. But this is an imperfect sort of cognition. That is why the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 4:4, “I am not conscious of anything in myself, but I am not thereby justified.” For as Psalm 18:13 says, “Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord.”

Reply to objection 1: The things that exist in the soul through its essence are known by an experiential cognition to the extent that a man experiences intrinsic principles through their acts, in the way that we perceive the will by willing and life in the vital works.

Reply to objection 2: It is part of the nature of knowledge (*de ratione scientiae*) that a man has certitude about the things of which he has knowledge, and it is likewise part of the nature of faith that a man is certain about those things with respect to which he has faith. This is because certitude has to do with the perfection of the intellect, in which these two gifts exist. And so whoever has knowledge or faith is certain that he has them. However, there is no similar argument for grace or charity or other things of this sort, which perfect the *appetitive* power.

Reply to objection 3: Sin has as its principle and as its object some changeable good that is known to us. But the object or end of grace is not known to us because of the immensity of the light source (*propter sui luminis immensitatem*)—this according to 1 Timothy 6:16 (“... who inhabits light inaccessible”).

Reply to objection 4: The Apostle is here speaking about the gifts of glory, which are given to us in hope and which we know with greatest certitude through faith—even though we do not know with certitude that we have grace, through which we are able to merit those gifts.

An alternative reply is that he is talking about the sort of privileged knowledge that comes through a revelation. This is why he adds, “But to us God has revealed them through His Holy Spirit.”

Reply to objection 5: The words spoken to Abraham can likewise be traced back to experiential knowledge, which occurs through the manifestation of a work. For in that work which Abraham had done he was able to know experientially that he had the fear of God.

An alternative reply is that it can also be traced back to a revelation.